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**MARRYING FORCE WITH DIPLOMACY IN THE
FORMER YUGOSLAVIA:
WHAT WENT WRONG, WHERE TO NEXT**

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Central to the Clinton administration's efforts to grapple with the tragic and destabilizing consequences of Yugoslavia's disintegration has been the concept of marrying force with diplomacy. In contrast to the Bush administration's calculated "leave it to the Europeans" strategy and "tough talk, weak stick" policy, the Clinton administration undertook efforts to marshal Western military power toward three distinct aims: relieving suffering, containing the conflict, and promoting a negotiated settlement. The U.S. was doing so, President Clinton explained in a February 1994 radio address on the eve of possible NATO air strikes, not just for humanitarian reasons, but because distinct U.S. interests were at stake.¹

Just a year later, the marriage between force and diplomacy in U.S. Balkan policy had unraveled. Despite limited pressure from Serbian leader Milosevic on his Bosnian Serb proxies intended to ease international sanctions on Serbia, both Bosnian Serb militants and "Krajina" Serbs in Croatia continued to rebuff U.S.-proposed diplomatic settlements. Seen as a paper tiger, the U.S. had lost influence with foes and friends: U.S. fighters patrolling Bosnian skies proved incapable of deterring brazen violations of the no-fly zone; Bosnian Serb forces resumed periodic shelling of Sarajevo and other "safe zones"; Serbia shipped weapons to allies in Croatia and Bosnia, despite international monitoring of its borders; Bosnian President Izetbegovic strengthened ties to Iran to obtain arms; Croatian President Tudjman engaged in dangerous brinkmanship over renewal of the UN peacekeeping mandate in Croatia, backing down only under extreme pressure from the U.S. and Germany; despite the preventive deployment of U.S. peacekeepers to

Macedonia, the threat of a Balkan spillover increased as ethnic tensions within Macedonia rose.²

What went wrong? Can the marriage between diplomacy and force be saved? Should it be saved, and if so, on what terms? This paper examines these questions, considering how deficiencies in overall U.S. Balkan policy impeded the effective use of military force. It concludes that the linkage between diplomacy and force can be effective in the former Yugoslavia if the overall strategy is adjusted by establishing realistic goals and ending the increasingly ineffectual and counterproductive UN mission in Bosnia. In the immediate future, the focus should be on preventing spillover -- a mission in which military force can play an important deterrent role.

HOW WE GOT HERE

A small cottage industry of pundits and academics has sprung up to critique U.S. and European policy toward the former Yugoslavia. Given the failure to halt the carnage and the public transatlantic debates which have from time to time erupted between the U.S. and its European allies on this issue, not surprisingly, much criticism strikes home. Before considering the relationship between diplomacy and force in our Balkan policy, it is instructive to review the main problems that have plagued international efforts to wrestle with Yugoslavia's collapse.³

Confused Strategy

Groping for a response to the collapse of Yugoslavia in 1991-92, the U.S.,

along with the EC, adopted a strategy of treating the previous internal borders among the Yugoslav republics as inviolable international borders. But in the face of Serbian opposition, the U.S. and EC were reluctant to treat the republics as fully sovereign. With EC recognition of Croatia and Slovenia, later EC/U.S. recognition of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and admission of all three states to the UN in 1992, this approach was ratified by the international community. Yet, in key respects the newly independent republics remained second-rate states: at the behest of Boutros Ghali and his special representative Cyrus Vance, the UN Security Council applied to the new UN member states an arms embargo originally aimed against the Serb-dominated Yugoslav army. Similarly, the deployment of UN forces to Croatia and later Bosnia-Herzegovina diluted sovereignty over Serb-occupied areas.

Necessarily, protection of UN forces became an issue in itself, one which -- given Serb military preponderance -- often ran at cross purposes to efforts to deliver humanitarian aid or uphold even the fiction of Bosnian and Croatian sovereignty over disputed areas.

Gap between Ends and Means

The arms embargo accentuated the already substantial gap between U.S. policy ends -- inviolable borders -- and available means to overcome stubborn Serbian opposition to the new internationally recognized borders. By the time Bosnia erupted into war in spring 1992, it had become clear that international law, condemnations, and sanctions were insufficient means to check Serbian ruthlessness and willingness to create new demographic facts on the ground

through "ethnic cleansing." Since then, a series of successive UN commanders for Bosnia and Croatia have complained bitterly of the gap between the missions assigned by the UN Security Council and the forces actually deployed to fulfill them.

Too Many Policy Cooks, Overlapping Chains of Command

The mismatch between ends and means in part resulted from the lack of clear direction in developing Western policy resulting from the initial U.S. abdication of a leadership role. Once the Bush administration had acceded (gratefully) to EC desires to take the lead on the former Yugoslavia in 1991, the EC proved incapable of overcoming its own internal disagreements, let alone leading others. Despite the leadership vacuum, the Bush administration took policy initiatives only episodically (for instance, to put in place the first UN trade sanctions on Serbia) and then did so largely to defuse domestic pressures for more forceful action.

While the Clinton administration came to office promising robust U.S. leadership, the new administration found Europeans eager for U.S. resources, but unwilling to accede to U.S. direction, pointing out that European but not U.S. troops were at risk on the ground. The result was a period of confusing, mixed signals from the new administration as a rancorous transatlantic dispute broke out over the application of military force. After a year of policy zig-zags, the administration finally found common ground with European allies on a limited NATO role in January 1994, but at the price of a costly compromise for sharing command responsibilities between the UN and NATO — a move which gave the UN veto power over NATO military actions.

REASSESSING DIPLOMACY PLUS FORCE

The three main problems troubling U.S. and European policy toward the Balkans since 1991 -- confused strategy, ends-means mismatch, and overlapping chains of command -- help to explain the difficulties the Clinton administration has had in applying the generally sound concept of buttressing diplomacy with force.

Certainly, as a tactical tool credible threats of force could greatly enhance Balkan diplomacy. This was demonstrated in 1994, when the threat of NATO air strikes enabled Russian diplomats to secure withdrawal of Bosnian Serb artillery emplacements and an end to regular Serbian bombardments of Sarajevo. But the weaknesses inherent in the overall Western policy approach to the Balkans prevented the U.S. from "cloning" the Sarajevo experience and successfully applying it to other "safe zones" in Bosnia -- let alone leveraging NATO power to achieve Serbian concessions in other troubled theaters of the former Yugoslavia such as Croatia or Kosovo.

What ultimately drove the diplomacy/force campaign aground was the contradiction inherent in UN humanitarian operations in Bosnia. Although Serbian military attacks were responsible for creating the humanitarian crisis UN troops were deployed to relieve, UN commanders (and their European sponsors) resisted taking sides and compromising already ambiguous UN neutrality. In particular, they were unwilling to put their forces at risk to Serb reprisals by authorizing extensive NATO strikes. Once exercised, UN veto power -- which our NATO allies had insisted on -- effectively gutted NATO's threats and strengthened Serbian, not NATO

Serbian, not NATO diplomacy. A year after the successful Bosnian Serb offensive on the "safe zone" of Gorazde, some UN sanctions against Serbia have been lifted and conditions for removal of the remaining sanction have become progressively less stringent. Today, U.S. diplomacy holds out carrots, not sticks.⁴

THE CASE AGAINST THE STATUS QUO

Against this background, a strong case can be made that it is time to reassess our Balkan policy. While the Clinton administration has successfully narrowed transatlantic differences on Bosnia by working closely with France, Germany and the UK in the Contact Group, evaluated against the key U.S. objectives -- relieving suffering, promoting a negotiated settlement, and containing the conflict -- today's policy gets good marks only for containment.

After four years of war in the former Yugoslavia, a negotiated peace appears as elusive as ever. Most observers expect a surge of fighting in Bosnia this spring, as Bosnian government forces have already gone on the offensive. It is hoped that the recent revision of the Croatian peacekeeping mandate will forestall renewed fighting in Croatia, but Croatia and the Krajina Serbs are far from a political agreement, with Milosevic still intent on absorbing at least some Krajina Serb-occupied territory into a Greater Serbia.⁵

While the bloodshed has so far been limited to Bosnia and Croatia, potential is still high for spillover along a southern front, either via the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia or the predominately ethnic Albanian Serbian province of

Kosovo. Open conflict in the south would likely draw in neighboring countries, especially Albania, spreading the war beyond the boundaries of the former Yugoslavia and risking confrontation between two NATO allies, Greece and Turkey.

Presently, combined UN operations (peacekeeping, relief, refugees) in the former Yugoslavia cost approximately \$5 billion per year. The U.S. share of that bill is about \$2 billion.⁶ In addition, U.S. military forces are engaged in UN-authorized operations such as Deny Flight (NATO no-fly zone enforcement), Able Sentry (preventive UN peacekeeping in Macedonia), sporadic air drops of relief supplies to Bosnian Muslim enclaves, and a series of smaller operations, such as deployment of a MASH unit to Zagreb. The total price tag, in terms of diverted resources, no doubt is considerably higher than \$2 billion. Unfortunately, absent a negotiated peace, it seems likely that demands on U.S. resources will just continue growing. The congressional move to cut U.S. funding for UN peacekeeping operations only underscores that the status quo -- expensive and risky -- is not sustainable.

AN ALTERNATIVE BALKAN POLICY

Focus on Fundamentals

The place to begin construction of a more effective Balkan policy is in its foundation: bringing U.S. national interests into sharper focus.⁷ Although Clinton administration statements on this issue have varied widely (on occasion downplaying U.S. interests in order to manage domestic political pressures), it is clear that the U.S. has two major interests at stake in the former Yugoslavia, both

linked to its broader strategic interests in Europe:

- Promoting stability. That means, in the first instance, attempting to halt the war via a negotiated settlement or, if that cannot be achieved, to contain the fighting; secondarily, deterring further use of force to change internationally recognized borders and limiting any "copycat" effect on others of the Serbs' bloody successes in making territorial gains.
- Preserving alliances. Beyond the former Yugoslavia, the U.S. has a major interest in maintaining the cohesiveness and credibility of the NATO alliance as a hedge against a variety of future military threats. While understood to be "out of area," the Yugoslav wars have shown NATO to be an impotent force, ill-suited for grappling with the immediate security challenges facing post-Cold War Europe, thus undermining support on both sides of the Atlantic for NATO's continued viability.

U.S. policy in the Balkans needs to keep a firm fix on these national interests, even at the expense of humanitarian concerns. Painful as it may be to admit, NATO's efforts to buttress the UN's humanitarian mission in Bosnia have failed. To maintain NATO's role as currently constituted can only undermine further the alliance's credibility, while bringing limited relief to Bosnia. Either the UN veto over NATO must end, or NATO's role itself should be gradually phased out. Certainly, there are difficulties to both approaches; however, our interest in preserving the alliance should lead us to abandon our current policy of drift.

In addition to bringing national interests into sharper focus, U.S. Balkan strategy needs to be grounded more carefully in a starkly realistic appraisal of

available means and achievable ends. Despite U.S. interest in stability, the near term outlook in the former Yugoslavia is for continued fighting and instability. U.S. strategy therefore is best focused on buying time for a viable regional settlement to emerge. That means (1) taking additional steps to limit the risk of spillover; (2) laying the groundwork for a settlement which does not reward Serbia's use of force and genocidal "ethnic cleansing" but also is realistic about what is attainable. Advancing these goals will concomitantly help to preserve NATO.

Limiting the risks that continued fighting poses while steering toward an eventual settlement is admittedly a tall order. The priority must be placed, however, on deterring spillover. In that regard, the current mix of incentives and pressures is inadequate. The answer is not offering more carrots to the Serbs as Russia and some Europeans have advocated.⁸ Indeed, doing so could well decrease prospects for stability if the Serbs see their way clear to pursue maximalist goals elsewhere, i.e. in Kosovo or Macedonia. Both the Bosnian Serbs and Milosevic have shown that they are ready to pocket any concessions offered to them, without becoming conciliatory toward their opponents.

Starting Again: Reviving the Marriage between Force and Diplomacy

In order to develop a more effective policy mix, the Clinton administration should resuscitate the policy of marrying diplomacy with force, taking care this time, however, to avoid the problems of confused strategy, ends-means mismatch, and overlapping command structures which undermined the effectiveness of NATO's application of military power to Bosnia in 1994.

If we make our strategic goals fit more realistically the situation on the ground, we can move a long way toward closing the gap between ends and means. As a starting point, we need to recognize — privately, if not yet publicly — that republic borders will be adjusted as part of any negotiated settlement between the victorious Serb militants and the non-Serb losers in this brutal war, Muslims and Croats. Our aim should not be to fashion a fig leaf which upholds the fiction of inviolable borders, but rather to support the survival of a rump Bosnian state and the best territorial deal possible for Croatia. We must be certain that Croatian and Bosnian leaders understand that their willingness to make territorial compromises is essential for continued U.S. political support and for any possibility of U.S. military aid in the future. In addition, the Serbs must be told that there will be no political rehabilitation of Serbia until a political solution is reached on Kosovo. To ignore Kosovo merely prolongs the greatest danger the Balkan conflict poses to U.S. national interests — the risk of spillover.

Within such a strategy, U.S. military force can play a useful role in bolstering diplomacy by deterring further Serbian territorial gains. In the first instance, threats to use U.S. military force should be focused on preventing spillover. NATO's record of ineffectiveness in Bosnia has sapped the credibility of previous U.S. threats against Serbia over Kosovo.⁹ To restore deterrence, the U.S. needs to back its earlier rhetoric with action. One effective way to do so would be to pre-position equipment and materiel in Macedonia, laying the groundwork for rapid reinforcement of the U.S. UN peacekeeping contingent and preparing a forward base

for unilateral U.S. movement into Kosovo should that prove necessary later. No additional deployment of U.S. peacekeepers would be necessary to signal our resolve to Serbia. Diplomatically, however, the U.S. could reinforce the deterrence message by seeking to jump start a dialogue between Milosevic and the Kosovar Albanian leaders.

As for Bosnia, it needs to be recognized that there can be no effective usage of outside military force against the Bosnian Serbs, even to preserve a rump Bosnian state, as long as UN forces are maintained in their current ambiguous, "humanitarian" role. Steps should be taken now to reduce the number of UN forces in Bosnia, just as in Croatia, with the goal of transferring the UN's humanitarian mission before next winter to Bosnian government forces. Ending the UN mission would provide incentives to all sides to reach a negotiated settlement before the winter. Withdrawal of the UN mission would eliminate the confusion over the chain of command and clear the way politically for the U.S. to provide military aid to the rump Bosnian state later, if necessary.

Conclusion: the Role for Military Power in the Balkans

Despite the recent setbacks to its Balkan policy, and the unraveling of an earlier-touted marriage between force and diplomacy, the Clinton administration was on the right track in recognizing that effective diplomacy in the Balkans requires a strong stick. Only diplomacy with a heavy degree of coercion has the means to coerce victorious Serb nationalists into reaching the sort of compromise agreements with the non-Serb populations of the former Yugoslavia which could

offer a modicum of stability.

The ineffectiveness and high costs of current U.S. policy toward the Balkans, however, argue for a reassessment of our entire strategy toward the former Yugoslavia, not just of the ways and means used to implement it. The aim of upholding internal republic borders has failed; recognizing our unwillingness to bear even higher costs, we should set our sights on less ambitious goals more conducive to securing long term regional stability: negotiation of defensible borders for rump Bosnian and Croatian states and opening of a Serb-Albanian political dialogue in Kosovo. With different goals and a different strategy, the marriage of diplomacy and force could well prove to be an effective vehicle for advancing U.S. interests.

NOTES

¹ Bill Clinton, "The President's Radio Address and an Exchange with Reporters," Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents, Vol 30, Iss. 8, Feb 28, 1994, pp 329-331.

² Summary of recent developments drawn largely from reporting in New York Times and Washington Post.

³ The best summary of the development of U.S. policy toward the former Yugoslavia is Lawrence Freedmann, "Why the West Failed," Foreign Policy, No. 97 (Winter 1994-95), pp. 53-70. There have been numerous explanations of the failures in Western policy. Those that follow are my own.

⁴ See Roger Cohen, "Facing Facts in Balkans," NYT, March 29, 1995, p.5.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Estimate provided by John Fox, former State Department official and director of Soros Foundation operations in the former Yugoslavia. Personal interview 4/6/95.

⁷ Although U.S. Balkan policy is partly motivated by humanitarian concerns and meeting humanitarian needs will necessarily form a part of overall U.S. policy, sustainable foreign policy must also be grounded in national interest, particularly in this time of budget stringency.

⁸ See, for example, Ben Barber, "Russia, Serbia offer way to end Balkan fighting," Washington Times, March 23, 1995, p. 1.

⁹ In December 1992 the Bush administration privately warned Milosevic that the U.S. was prepared to use force unilaterally against Serbia if Serbs unleashed large-scale violence in Kosovo, and then leaked the demarche to the press. Shortly after assuming office, the Clinton administration repeated the warning publicly.